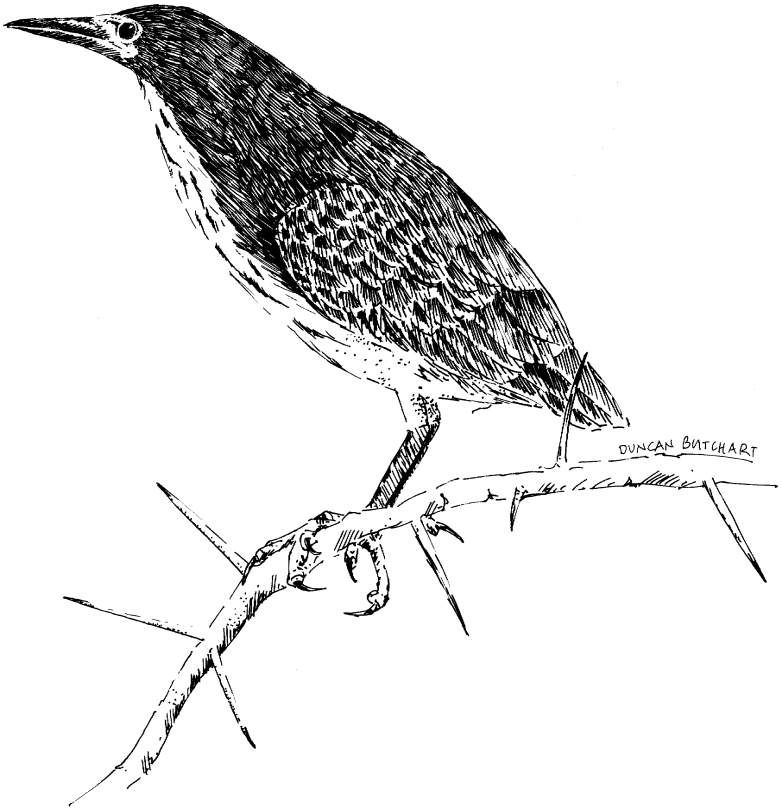


Dwarf Bittern

Dwergrietreier

Ixobrychus sturmii

The Dwarf Bittern is distributed throughout Africa south of the Sahara but avoids the arid regions. It may wander outside its normal range; e.g. it has been recorded near Cape Town (3318CD) (Brooke 1984b). The single southern Cape Province atlas record came from Gamkapoort Nature Reserve (3321BC) in early summer (Martin *et al.* 1991b). It is rare in most of its range, but can be locally common during the breeding season (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). This is clear from the atlas data which show a sparse distribution with low reporting rates.

It occurs solitarily or in pairs and forages mainly at night, making it inconspicuous. It is easily confused with the Greenbacked Heron *Butorides striatus* but it is distinguished by its smaller size, uniform slate-grey upperparts and wings, and heavy dark streaks on the underparts.

Habitat: It is typically found at seasonal freshwater wetlands (pans, floodplains and pools) with dense overhanging foliage along the margins. Particularly on migration it also frequents permanent waterbodies, such as reed marshes and mangroves (Irwin 1981; Brown *et al.* 1982; Hancock & Kushlan 1984; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). At Nylsvley (2428DA), a major South African stronghold, it inhabits the edges of the floodplain where rising water has inundated *Acacia* trees with areas of shallow water and emerging grasses (Tarboton 1980a). These are the first areas to dry up in winter and this waterbird is one of the first to desert the floodplain at the end of summer. The vegetation analysis shows that reporting rates were highest for the Okavango, Northern Kalahari and Mopane vegetation types, all semi-arid savanna and woodland regions with dramatic seasonal changes in inundation status. The association of the Dwarf Bittern with these vegetation types is conditional on the presence of suitable waterbodies.

Movements: It is a summer breeding migrant to southern Africa. As a 'rains migrant', timing of arrival and numbers vary from year to year, dependent on rainfall. The first birds may arrive in October, the majority in late November or during December; departure is in April, and a few young birds remain until May–June (Benson & Irwin 1966; Taylor 1979; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Herremans 1994d). This pattern is reflected in the models for Zones 1, 5 and 6.

Breeding: It breeds throughout its range (Brown *et al.* 1982) and in southern Africa egglaying has been recorded during summer. Peak egglaying appears to follow the seasonality of peak rainfall: December in the Transvaal, January in Zimbabwe and March in Namibia (Tarboton 1980; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press).

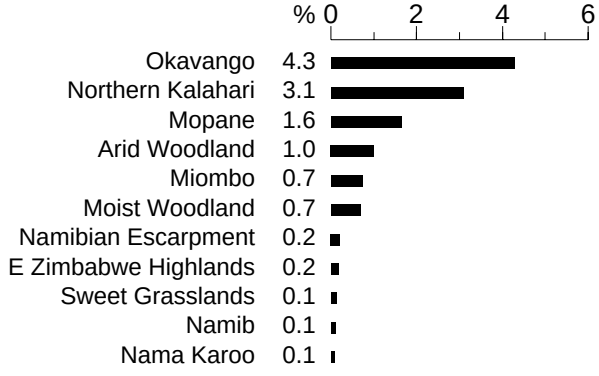
Interspecific relationships: It has been recorded nesting in association with Squacco *Ardeola ralloides* and Rufousbellied *Butorides rufiventris* Herons (Tarboton 1967).

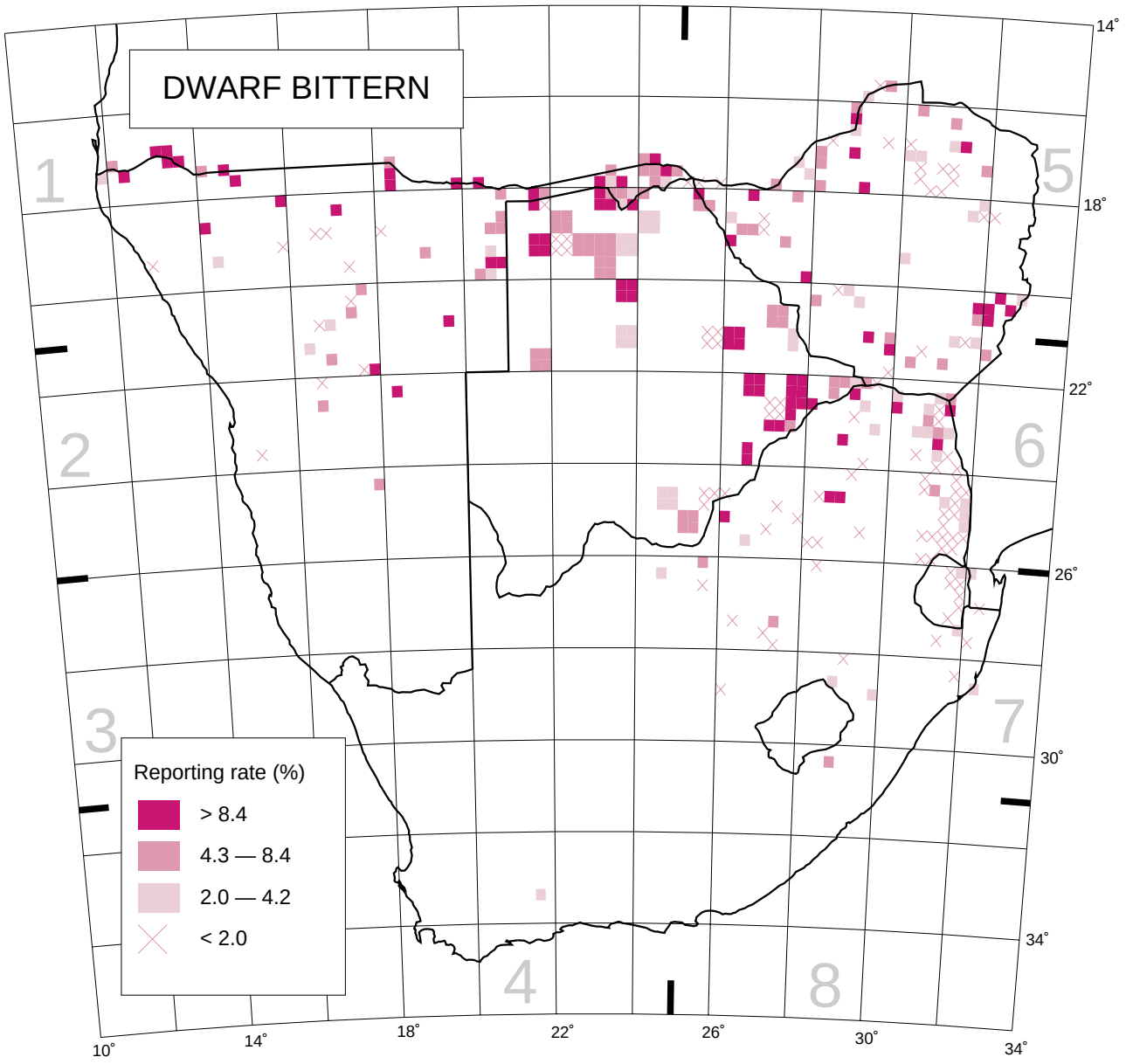
Historical distribution and conservation: The status of the Dwarf Bittern in South Africa is 'indeterminate' (Brooke 1984b), and it is not considered globally threatened (Del Hoyo 1992). The South African population has been estimated at *c.* 200 pairs and there is no evidence of a population decline (Brooke 1984b). The regional population is probably small and it depends on erratically available habitat, which could render it vulnerable, for example if droughts were to become more regular. Nylsvley is an important site for the species in South Africa.

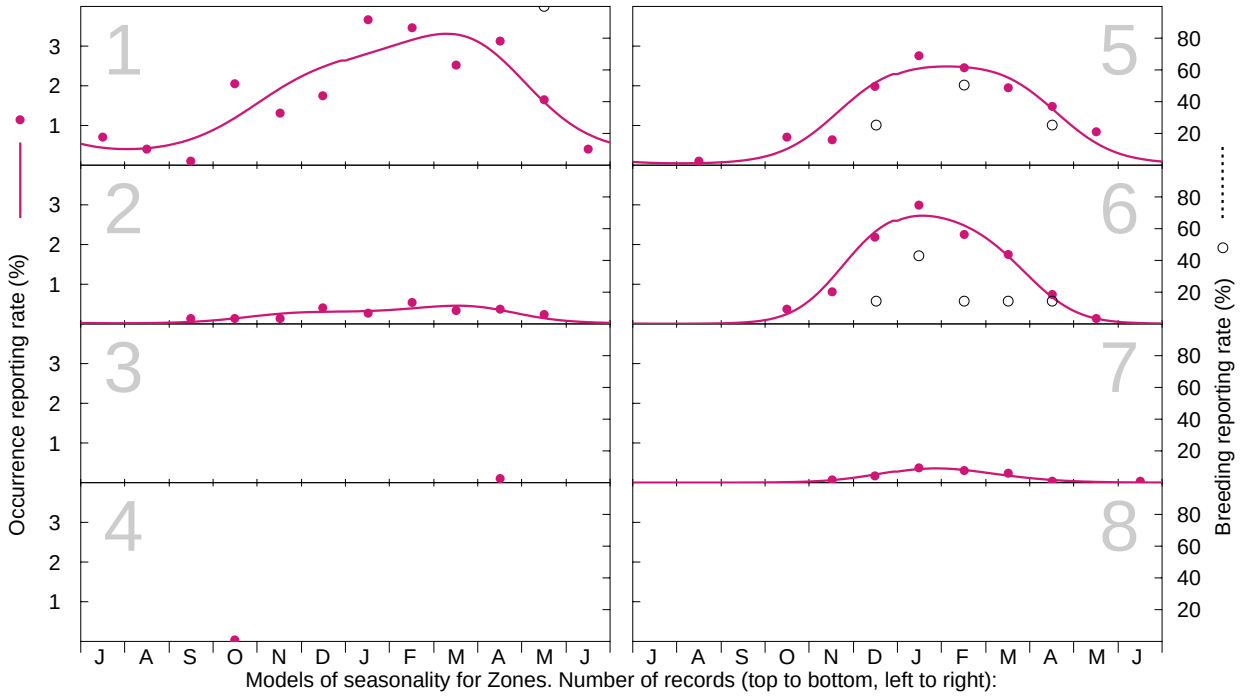
R.A. Navarro

Recorded in 334 grid cells, 7.4%
Total number of records: 574
Mean reporting rate for range: 2.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 156, 22, 1, 1, 122, 228, 44, 0; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 4, 7, 0, 0.